

## **Parties and Party Systems\***

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Although political parties are rarely mentioned in constitutions, there is not a single modern democracy that does not have them. Indeed, scholars have long noted their indispensability to mass, representative democracy (Key 1958; Rosenblum 2008; Schattschneider 2003 [1942]; Stokes 1999).<sup>1</sup> Parties resolve collective action and social choice problems in legislative decision-making (Aldrich 1995). They serve as heuristic devices and bundle policy dimensions for voters who lack the time or inclination to learn about every issue and every candidate (Downs 1957; Popkin 1991). They structure electoral competition with a stable menu of options that makes uncertain elections more predictable and extends the time-horizon of politicians (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). And they discipline politicians and hold them to account even when voters cannot (Alesina and Spear 1988).

This has long focused scholarly attention on parties and party systems, generating a voluminous body of studies. But the task of theorizing party politics is a daunting one: parties are at once institutions that persist over time and dynamic organizations that change constantly. It is not surprising, then, that fundamental questions about this important topic of political research remain far from settled. For instance, scholars continue to debate why and how parties emerge, why some new parties survive, and why established ones collapse. Moreover, early studies of political parties extrapolated from the unique experiences of advanced democracies in Western Europe and the United States. In some cases, their insights have helped us understand subsequent developments in newer democracies, but in many cases, their expectations have clashed with empirical reality. Even within the advanced democracies, parties and party systems changed in ways unanticipated by earlier theories. Booming cross-national survey data also

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<sup>1</sup> However, political parties also prove indispensable to some nondemocratic regimes (Brownlee 2007; Greene 2007).

made it possible to subject long-accepted theoretical assumptions to empirical testing, with (at best) mixed results.

Students of party politics have approached the discrepancy between received theories and changing empirical realities in two ways. The *splitters* argue that theories derived from the experiences of advanced democracies at particular moments fail to apply to other places or times. In these times and contexts, alternative explanations performed better at explaining party formation, competition, or strategy. Studies of this type have vastly enriched our understanding of party politics and expanded the kinds of factors we know *can* affect parties and party systems. Whereas early studies of political parties focused on exogenous cleavages or institutions to explain stasis and change, more recent scholars have noted how parties and party systems persist or transform as a result of endogenous factors. The very strategies parties employ in response to particular threats can affect their survival and the stability of the party system. Similarly, scholars have found that parties employ different types of appeals to mobilize voters, depending on various contextual and temporal factors.

Scholars who are *lumpers* have taken a different approach to grapple with puzzling empirical developments: they try to generate broad theoretical frameworks that incorporate prior theories of party politics and also help us understand diverging empirical patterns.<sup>2</sup> These kinds of frameworks specify the circumstances under which we would expect prior theories to hold and those under which parties and party systems may develop and behave quite differently. This approach thus seeks to simultaneously understand both why received theories explain a certain

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<sup>2</sup> The division between lumpers and splitters derives from debates in biology over taxonomy, and apparently dates back to Charles Darwin.

subset of cases and also why and how other cases diverge. The timing of regime change and party formation may make some parties and party systems differ from others, or they may conform to received theories in contexts of low political uncertainty but diverge from those expectations dramatically in highly uncertain political settings.

This chapter traces these parallel scholarly developments by focusing on three unsettled questions in the study of parties of party systems: (1) why parties and party systems persist or change over time, (2) how parties appeal to voters, and (3) why parties and party systems in developing democracies differ from those in older ones. In each case, recent studies have highlighted new empirical puzzles or brought new data to bear on untested claims. Offering new explanations and findings, they have expanded our theoretical scope by suggesting new kinds of factors that shape parties and party systems. And they have offered broader theoretical frameworks that help us make sense of both prior contributions and puzzling new developments.

### **Origins, Stasis, and Change**

How we understand why parties and party systems change or perpetuate over time depends in part on where we think they come from. Early studies of political parties tended to fall into one of two perspectives. One set of scholars focused their efforts on explaining party systems they viewed as largely static over time. In their seminal study, Lipset and Rokkan (1990 [1967]) famously posited that rare critical junctures – the Reformation, democratization, or the Industrial Revolution – froze European party systems in place around a particular social cleavage that came

to dominate others (see also Bartolini and Mair 1990).<sup>3</sup> “The party systems of the 1960s,” they noted, “reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s” (Lipset and Rokkan 1990 [1967]: 134). Although later scholars suggested a further, post-materialist critical juncture might again have reshaped European party systems (e.g., Inglehart 1977), the notion that party systems coalesce at key junctures and thereafter remain fixed seemed to characterize developed democracies fairly well.

A similar perspective prevailed within the study of U.S. politics. Observers of the U.S. party system noticed its long periods of stasis, punctuated by major shifts at critical elections or realignments (e.g., Beck 1974; Burnham 1970; Key 1955, 1959; Sundquist 1983). Despite blistering critiques of this characterization of U.S. party politics (Mayhew 2004), scholars continue to defend the perspective that party systems remain stable for long stretches between critical junctures (e.g., Merrill et al. 2008; Norpoth and Rusk 2007).

Other scholars, beginning with Duverger (1951), explained the origins and long-term stability of these party systems in institutional terms (e.g., Aldrich 1995; Calvo and Hellwig 2011; Ezrow 2011). As long as institutions like electoral rules remained in place, parties and party systems that had adapted to those institutions would prevail. Voters would not waste their votes on new, uncompetitive options, and elites would coordinate around and join the existing, competitive parties (Cox 1997). Stable institutions would thus generate a stable configuration of parties

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<sup>3</sup> Hanson (2010) offers an alternative account that ideology can motivate party formation in contexts characterized by social chaos and political uncertainty. For Noel (2013), ideology exists independent of parties, though parties sometimes organize along ideological divisions.

(Lijphart 1994; Powell 2000; Sartori 1976). Only major institutional changes would upend the frozen party system.

An alternative perspective, building on the seminal contributions of Downs (1957), viewed party systems instead as fundamentally dynamic. Spatial models of party competition assume that strategic parties immediately internalize changing electoral incentives, whether they take the form of new electoral rules, shifting public opinion, or increased competition (e.g., Hinich and Munger 1994; Roemer 2001; Schofield 2008). These exogenous factors change the optimal strategies of parties, and spatial models assume that parties quickly adapt to these new circumstances. But while these simplifying assumptions allowed spatial models to fare well in explaining the equilibrium positioning of parties, they often over-predicted change. In advanced democracies, major parties seemed slow to change even when they knew they were uncompetitive (Przeworski and Sprague 1990; but see Sánchez-Cuenca 2004).

Contradicting both the stasis predicted by cleavage-based accounts and the dynamism of the spatial model, parties and party systems in the advanced democracies did slowly change during the 1980s and 1990s (Kitschelt 1994). Scholars also increasingly observed new parties emerge (Hug 2001): niche parties took up narrow non-economic issues (Wagner 2012), and radical right parties espoused anti-immigrant positions (Kitschelt 1996; Mudde 2007). At the same time, old parties seemed to transform their organizations and shift their mobilization strategies, detaching from voters (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Katz and Mair 1995, 2009).<sup>4</sup> Some parties and party systems even collapsed unexpectedly (e.g., Cox et al. 1999; Golden 2004; Vowles 1995;

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<sup>4</sup> Mair (2013) suggests that this detachment created opportunities for anti-system parties (see Capoccia 2002) to make electoral inroads in several Western European countries.

Wellhofer 2001). Figure 1 illustrates both the rising number of competitive parties in advanced democracies since 1950 and declining party memberships.

[Figure 1 here]

In the newly democratizing countries of the developing world, similar changes occurred much more rapidly. In some new democracies – particularly those where most parties were also new – it took some time for voters to learn about the parties and for politicians to form strategic coalitions.<sup>5</sup> Fairly quickly, voters and elites coalesced on a subset of parties that seemed particularly competitive, and irrelevant parties disappeared (Tavits 2005; Tavits and Annus 2006). But in others, party systems did not seem to coalesce. When Mainwaring and Scully (1995) astutely classified some party systems as institutionalized and others as inchoate (see also Mainwaring and Torcal 2006), they held out hope that repeated democratic competition to reinforce the institutionalized ones and strengthen the inchoate ones (see also Dix 1992). “Democratic stability,” they posited, “encourages institutionalization” (28). The process of “shaking out” the initial party system (Bernhard and Karakoç 2011: 3) would eventually yield a stable system akin to the “frozen” party systems of Western Europe and the United States.

Decades later, though, many party systems in the developing world continue to be weak and inchoate. It seems that systems can also freeze into an equilibrium of fluidity and incoherence, not just an institutionalized and stable one. Even so, some parties and party systems subsequently underwent tremendous changes, veering from their expected paths. In Latin

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<sup>5</sup> Even in these settings, party systems were not a *tabula rasa*; parties clearly built upon legacies and prior civil-society organizations (Kitschelt et al. 1999; LeBas 2011; Wittenberg 2006).

America, for instance, indigenous parties emerged and sometimes succeeded electorally (Madrid 2012; Van Cott 2005). As in some advanced democracies, some previously institutionalized parties and party systems in the developing world weakened or completely collapsed (Lupu Forthcoming; Morgan 2011; Seawright 2012). In some cases, these developments responded to the kinds of variables that similarly concerned early party scholars: institutional reforms like electoral rule changes (Hicken 2009; Remmer 2008; Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Van Cott 2005), shifts in social cleavages (Evans 2006; Stoll 2013; Tavits and Letki 2014), or specific critical junctures (Roberts 2013; Slater 2010). Yet, in others, neither the underlying social cleavage nor the electoral rules can account for the transformations of parties and party systems.

Change in these cases responded instead to the capacities, choices, and strategies of the parties themselves. Recent studies of these cases highlight that parties and party systems sometimes change *endogenously*. Without changing the electoral rules or the basic societal cleavages, party systems sometimes transform from within.

One set of these studies examines the role of historical legacies in guiding the capacities and choices of parties. In post-Soviet transition to democracy, it was the capacity of the communist successor parties that helped determine whether party competition would stabilize or fluidity would prevail (Grzymala-Busse 2002). Where communist successor parties inherited coherent and credible organizations, they stabilized both party competition and the democratic regime. In Sub-Saharan Africa, authoritarian rulers played a similar key role. Authoritarians who had secured their power by incorporating – rather than supplanting – local power brokers were better able to control the transition process, win founding elections, and force opposition leaders to



coalesce into stable party organizations, institutionalizing a competitive party system (Riedl 2014; see also Hicken and Kuhonta 2011, Forthcoming). These explanations have gone a long way toward helping us understand why some new democracies quickly institutionalize stable party competition whereas others fluidly cycle through weak and ephemeral parties.

Whereas these studies focus on the inherited capacities of parties, other studies of endogenous change focus on party strategies. In Western Europe, how the major mainstream parties responded to electoral threats from emerging niche parties determined whether these new entrants would succeed (Meguid 2008).<sup>6</sup> When mainstream parties chose to adopt the new issues raised by niche parties, they successfully stymied the competition; but when they chose to dismiss or attach the new issues, niche parties grew. In Latin America, the types of appeals employed by new indigenous parties appears to explain their electoral success (Madrid 2012). Those that combined ethnic and populist appeals succeeded in building a winning electoral coalition, whereas those that appealed to voters only along ethnic lines, made little inroads.

How parties adopted market-oriented economic reforms in Latin America also helps to explain their electoral survival or devastating failure (Lupu Forthcoming). During the 1980s and 1990s, parties across the region bowed to international pressures to implement economic policies inconsistent with their traditional positions, provoking internal conflicts and forming strange-bedfellow alliances with historic rivals. This diluted their brands and eroded voters' attachments to these parties. Without the assured support of a partisan base, these parties become more susceptible to collapse, upending even the most stable party systems in the region. The policy

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<sup>6</sup> Similarly, party strategies may activate particular cleavages that then shape the party system (e.g., Chandra 2004; Kalyvas 1996; Tavits and Letki 2014).

choices of individual parties can thus have enormous impacts on their survival and the nature of the party system. Major changes in parties and party systems can emerge endogenously from the choices and capacities of the parties themselves.

Whether to explain stasis or change in parties and party systems, scholars have long been building upon the insights of early studies that focused their explanations on influences outside the party system – institutions, social cleavages, and their interaction. But recent scholars have highlighted that endogenous factors affect parties and party systems across countries and over time.<sup>7</sup> In new democracies, party capacities inherited from authoritarian rule have played key roles in stabilizing party competition. In Europe and Latin America, party systems have also endured or changed because of how parties themselves chose to confront new challenges ranging from niche parties to international pressures for economic reform. Parties and party systems may for long stretches of time appear frozen at an institutional equilibrium or around a particular historic cleavage. But scholars are increasingly recognizing that such stasis is also maintained by ongoing endogenous policy choices. Even without electoral reforms or major social transformation, parties' policies themselves can transform parties and party systems.

### **Voters, Parties, and Party Systems**

If parties and party systems are indeed dynamic – either reproducing static equilibria or changing over time – then how are those dynamics perceived by voters? After all, parties are intermediaries: they mediate the relationship between voters and government institutions (e.g.,

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<sup>7</sup> In some ways, studies that emphasized critical junctures allowed for endogenous change, but only during these specific moments of uncertainty and political opening (see Capoccia and Kelemen 2007).

Caillaud and Tirole 2002; Rosenblum 2008). By influencing the electoral success of the parties, citizens can shape the policy outcomes of legislative bodies. Parties may play a more important intermediary role in some systems than in others (Samuels and Shugart 2010); where elections are candidate- rather than party-centered, or where parties are weakly institutionalized, they may be incapable of successfully mediating voter-government interactions. But this is one of the key roles of parties that makes them indispensable for modern mass democracies.

The empirical question is whether in fact citizens and parties behave this way, even under the most hospitable institutional and structural arrangements. If parties indeed act as political intermediaries, they should act on the preferences of voters. Indeed, spatial models assume that party competition incentivizes parties to change in tandem with public opinion. And cleavage-based accounts expect that parties will represent discrete segments of a salient social cleavage. But do parties in fact behave this way? And do voters punish those that do not?

Empirical studies in advanced democracies suggest that parties do sometimes change their positions in response to public opinion. In Western Europe, mainstream parties generally shifted the ideological tone of their manifestos in response to changes in citizens' preferences (Adams et al. 2004, 2006, 2009; McDonald and Budge 2005).<sup>8</sup> And niche parties seem to have changed their policy positions when the preferences of their current supporters changed (Ezrow et al. 2011). On the other hand, in the United States, the two major parties seem to have become more extreme than the electorate.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, when parties veer away from voters' preferences, they

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<sup>8</sup> Tavits (2007) finds that such shifts were rewarded by voters when they involved pragmatic, rather than principled, issues.

<sup>9</sup> While there is broad consensus among scholars of U.S. politics that the parties have polarized (e.g., Layman et al. 2006; McCarty et al. 2009), there is a great deal of debate as to whether the electorate has also polarized

appear to pay an electoral price (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012; Spoon 2011). Whether similar party responsiveness occurs in developing democracies remains an open question. In Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s, parties regularly implemented neoliberal economic reforms in response to international pressures with little public support (Campello Forthcoming; Remmer 1998; Stallings 1992). Even when doing so required breaking their own campaign promises, these parties nevertheless paid few electoral costs in the immediate term (Johnson and Ryu 2010; Stokes 2001). At least in this context, voters do not appear to punish parties that shift away from their preferences.

One possible reason for this is that voters simply fail to notice when parties change their stripes. At least in the United States, most voters pay little attention to politics (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), so parties may be able to shift without voters noticing. But studies of cross-national survey data are inconclusive on this score, with some finding that voters do not register party shifts (Adams et al. 2011) and others finding that they do (Lupu 2013). Certainly, in the dramatic cases of Latin American policy switches, voters were well aware that parties had radically shifted their platforms (Lupu Forthcoming). Another possibility is that parties cue voters, rather than voter preferences driving party positions. In the United States, studies find some evidence that voters change their preferences based on their party's position (Goren 2005; Carsey and Layman 2006), although similar cuing does not seem to take place elsewhere (Adams et al. 2011).

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(Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Heatherington 2009). Similarly, Iversen (1994) finds that party positions are more extreme than those of voters. Kedar (2009) offers a compelling explanation for this phenomenon.

A final explanation for incongruence between voters and parties is that voters may simply support parties for non-programmatic reasons. If that is the case, then citizens would have little reason to follow parties' ideological shifts, let alone use those changes to inform their choice at the ballot box. Some scholars note that valence evaluations may trump position issues for some voters (Stokes 1963, 1992). Valence issues are those on which all voters hold the same position. All voters agree that they prefer economic prosperity and disfavor political corruption. Since voters agree about valence issues, all parties take the consensus position. Every party is for economic prosperity and against corruption; the difference among them is the degree to which they are seen as more competent on a particular valence issue than others. Some parties are viewed as weaker on fighting corruption, others as more competent stewards of the economy, because of either the particular qualities of their leaders or the successes and failures of their tenure in government (e.g., Clark 2014). Retrospective economic voting is thus one form of valence-based evaluation (Fiorina 1981). Voters may be giving parties free reign in terms of policy, as long as the policies they choose generate good outcomes (Bleck and van de Walle 2013; Stokes 2001).<sup>10</sup>

Other non-programmatic considerations could include partisanship, ethnicity, and clientelism. Voters around the world form lasting attachments to political parties. Following the classical perspective on these attachments (Campbell et al. 1960), some scholars view them as orthogonal to the party's ideological position (Adams et al. 2005). If that is the case, then widespread partisanship would allow parties to take ideological positions less in line with voter preferences. Similarly, if voters choose parties because of ethnic affinities unrelated to policy (Horowitz

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<sup>10</sup> Scholars have developed spatial models of party competition in which some voters vote on the basis of valence issues (e.g., Adams et al. 2005; Schofield 2003, 2004).

1985), or if voters sell their votes to party machines in return for particularistic goods (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Wantchekon 2003), then parties will be unconstrained by public opinion in choosing their policies. Thus, if considerations of partisanship, ethnicity, or clientelism are orthogonal to party's policy positions, and if they weigh heavily in determining how most citizens vote in certain contexts, this could explain why party policies appear unrelated to voter preferences. Parties would be failing to fulfill their essential function to obtain "popular consent to the course of public policy" (Key 1958: 12).

In certain contexts, these factors may help to explain why parties fail to respond to voters' policy preferences. But they are unlikely to be the whole story. Recent research on partisan attachments shows that is often closely related to policy (Achen 2002; Fiorina 1981), making it unlikely to be a main source of party-voter divergence. Indeed, voters' partisan attachments respond to the policy shifts parties (Lupu 2014, Forthcoming), if sometimes slowly (Green et al. 2005). Similarly, ethnic considerations are often correlated with policy preferences, and the extent of ethnic voting even in contexts where ethnicity is very salient appears to be exaggerated (e.g., Hoffman and Long 2013; but see Ichino and Nathan 2013).<sup>11</sup> As Figure 2 demonstrates, ethnic diversity explains only a fraction of the cross-national variation in the strength of ethnic parties.<sup>12</sup> Finally, we still know little about the extent of clientelism around the world (e.g., Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2012), and there are good reasons to think that there are limits on the extent to which parties can rely on clientelism (Weitz-Shapiro 2013). We also know even less about the extent to which clientelism trumps other voter considerations. In fact, recent studies

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<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the extent to which ethnic identity is activated as a determinant of vote choice may be a product of party strategies (Chandra 2004) or institutions (Posner 2005).

<sup>12</sup> The measure of ethnic party strength cannot be comparably measured for the Latin American cases, so I exclude them here.

suggest that parties target clientelistic goods, and pork, more generally, at their core supporters – voters whose policy preferences are already in line with the party (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 1986; Stokes et al. 2013). If that is the case, then clientelistic links between voters and parties can hardly be seen as orthogonal to programmatic ones.

[Figure 2 here]

Scholars are still struggling to understand the complex relationship between voters and parties. Theories about parties and party systems typically focus on structural or elite-level factors and make (often implicit) assumptions that voters notice party behavior, that they punish unaccountable parties, and that they determine which party to support on policy grounds. But events in the real world, as well as empirical studies, suggest otherwise: voters sometimes seem unaware of party shifts, they regularly fail to punish parties that take unpopular positions, and they consider factors other than party program when casting their ballots. Students of party politics are increasingly coming to terms with these inconvenient facts from political behavior. Bridging the gap between these historically distinct fields of research will substantially improve our understanding of parties and party systems.

### **Old and New Democracies**

Historically, theories of party politics were gleaned from the experiences of advanced democracies in Western Europe and the United States. To a certain extent, that regional focus limited the kinds of puzzles that scholars undertook to study. For instance, important questions

on single-party dominance (e.g., Greene 2007; Magaloni 2006; Smith 2005) or party politics in non-democracies (e.g., Brownlee 2007; Levitsky and Way 2010) did not make it on to the agenda of research on parties and party systems until recently. As democracy emerged (or reemerged) in the developing world during the Third Wave, scholars looked to existing theories of party politics in an effort to explain parties and party systems in these newly competitive systems.

Often, the behaviors and structures of parties in these developing democracies remained puzzling. Party systems in developing democracies appeared more volatile (e.g., Kreuzer and Pettai 2003; Mozaffar and Scarrit 2005; Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Tavits 2005) and less institutionalized (Dix 1992; Hicken and Kuhonta Forthcoming; Kuenzi and Lambright, 2001, 2005; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Stockton 2001), voter attachments with parties seemed weaker (Dalton and Weldon 2007; Hale 2006; Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007; Manning 2005), parties appeared less reliant on programmatic appeals (Keefer 2007; Kitschelt et al. 1999, 2010; Bratton and van de Walle 1997), and party systems were not always organized along salient social cleavages (e.g., Dix 1989; Kitschelt 1992). Figure 3 illustrates one manifestation of this difference: elections in older democracies exhibit significantly less volatility than those in newer democracies. Moreover, decades of continued party competition have rarely diminished – and sometimes even exacerbated – these divergences from theoretical expectations and experiences in advanced democracies (e.g., Reich 2001, 2004; Roberts and Wibbels 1999).

[Figure 3 here]



One reason might be that the timing of democratization matters for party politics. An obvious difference between advanced and developing democracies is that the latter emerged later in world-historical time. The global context was vastly different in the nineteenth century, when most advanced democracies appeared, than it was in the 1980s and 1990s, when many developing democracies emerged. Parties in older democracies had been the vehicles by which societal groups pressured for suffrage extensions. By the time new democracies emerged, universal suffrage had become the international norm (Schmitter 2001). And whereas political entrepreneurs had used parties to mobilize supporters in the old democracies, by the 1980s they could communicate directly with voters through mass media instead. As a result, politicians no longer needed to nurture partisan attachments in order to successfully compete in elections (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007). By the time new democracies emerged, the age of mass parties was over. That different historical context plays a crucial role in setting up the incentives around which parties form and compete. So old democracies had embarked on one path of party politics in the nineteenth century, and new democracies would embark on a very different one.

More commonly, scholars have focused on contingent shocks or institutional arrangements to explain why parties and party systems in new democracies diverge from the theoretical expectations derived from old ones. Economic transitions or crises struck new democracies particularly severely in the 1980s and 1990s, transforming or upending parties and party systems (e.g., Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Roberts 2013). Partly as a result, politicians felt compelled to use bait-and-switch tactics to implement market-oriented economic reforms, tactics that undermined parties, fragmented party systems, and weakened programmatic competition

(Kitschelt et al. 2010; Lupu Forthcoming; Stokes 2001). In other cases, new democracies adopted peculiar institutional arrangements that differed from those in advanced democracies and informed party development (e.g., Hicken 2009). Or else new democracies inherited distinctive legacies or leaders that shaped parties and party systems in distinctive ways (Grzymala-Busse 2002, 2013; Hale 2006; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Riedl 2014; Tavits 2013; Weghorst and Bernhard Forthcoming). Since factors like colonial or authoritarian institutions were specific to developing democracies, they could well have caused their parties and party systems to diverge from expectations based on the experiences of advanced democracies.

Both of these approaches have strengths and weaknesses. The fact that developing democracies emerged through a different sequence of events and at a very different moment in world history doubtless affected party development. But the strong, deterministic expectation that mass parties will not emerge in these contexts belies the varied trajectories of parties and party systems in these new democracies. Some strong mass parties have indeed emerged in these contexts, and others have successfully adapted to new environments (e.g., Hunter 2010; Levitsky 2003; Lupu and Stokes 2010). At the same time, historical legacies and contingencies surely have influenced parties and party systems in these contexts. But these explanations yield scattered case- or region-specific theories that are difficult to extend coherently into a general framework.

Building on aspects of both perspectives, Lupu and Riedl (2013) offer such a theoretical framework at a broader level of generality. They argue that political uncertainty is significantly higher in developing democracies than in advanced ones, and this affects the choices of political elites. In these contexts, political actors ascribe some nontrivial probability to the possibility of

authoritarian reversals or major institutional changes, making it difficult to predict how long the current rules of the game will persist. Developing democracies tend also to have emerging economies that are particularly vulnerable to market swings and susceptible to economic shocks amid financial globalization. As a result, the possibility of exogenous shocks that transform the entire structure of political interaction is much higher in new democracies than in older ones. This heightened unpredictability means that political elites may prioritize short-term gains and hedge their political strategies. They may, therefore, invest less in programmatic appeals, consistent party brands, and institutionalized party organizations.

Developing democracies followed different historical trajectories and confronted different domestic and international opportunities and constraints than the older, advanced democracies. These differences have had lasting effects, making parties and party systems in developing democracies less institutionalized, more unstable, and less programmatic. But how we think about the underlying causal relationship affects not only the generality of our theories but also our expectations about the future of political parties in new democracies. The path-dependent approach, that the age of mass parties is over, implies a particularly pessimistic outlook that overlooks variation among these systems. The contextual approach does better at explaining regional or case-specific variation, but can be difficult to generalize. One way forward is to combine aspects of both approaches into a more general framework. For instance, recognizing that political uncertainty tends to be higher in developing democracies than in advanced ones may help us explain both the general divergence in outcomes between them and also variation within them. Similarly general frameworks may help us not only to explain why parties and

party systems look so different in new democracies, but may also teach us something about variations among and changes within old democracies.

## **Political Parties and Democracy**

A combination of splitting and lumping approaches have contributed enormously to our understanding of parties and party systems in recent years. Splitters have highlighted additional factors – beyond those emphasized by early scholarship on Western Europe – that help explain how parties emerge, how they persist or change over time, and how they differ across contexts in their behavior or strategies for appealing to voters. Early scholars emphasized the role of social cleavages and electoral institutions in determining these outcomes. More recent studies suggest both more nuanced mechanisms underlying those relationships and additional factors – including institutional legacies and parties’ strategic choices – that help us better understand how parties and party systems form, persist, and change. Whereas early theories of party competition made simplifying assumptions about the link between parties and voter, newer efforts to link voter behavior and party politics yield a richer understanding. Under some circumstances – that scholars are just beginning to identify – parties appeal to voters through valence, partisanship, ethnicity, or clientelism, each with different implications for party politics. These contributions have vastly expanded the set of variables scholars should consider in trying to understand parties and party systems around the world.

But if this expanding set of variables seems disparate or specific to particular cases, lumpers are starting to offer more general frameworks that encompass many of them. These efforts look for

more general dimensions that make one set of variables more determinative than another. So a continuum of political uncertainty might explain why cleavages and institutions seem to explain a great deal about party politics in advanced democracies and far less in developing ones. And thinking about these broader dimensions could help us better explain variation even among cases that, even while broadly consistent with received theories, exhibit nuanced differences. For instance, differences in economic uncertainty among advanced democracies may help to explain why some parties and party systems emerged unscathed from the Great Recession while transformed dramatically.

Both approaches have taught us a great deal about party politics, but they also leave many questions unanswered. We know that salient social cleavages matter, but how do latent cleavages come to be salient, and why do some take precedence over others in shaping the party system? We have also learned that parties employ a variety of strategies to mobilize voters – from fostering partisan attachments to priming ethnic identity to buying votes – but how do parties choose among them? Or, perhaps more accurately, how do parties diversify their portfolio of mobilization strategies, and under what conditions does the portfolio change? These are crucial questions if we hope to understand, for instance, how non-programmatic parties might become more programmatic, potentially even allowing policymakers to propel that process forward. Similarly, we know that parties organize differently both within and across countries, but where do these organizational differences come from? And how do they affect party strategies? Finally, theories of party politics necessarily involve voters, but causality in their relationship seems to go both ways. What we need to examine further is the conditions under

which voters determine the choices of parties, and those under which parties instead influence voters.

Scholars have been studying parties and party systems for over a century, and yet these and many other puzzles remain unresolved. That is partly because – perhaps unlike most other political institutions – parties are uniquely dynamic organizations constantly evolving and continually interacting with individual voters. It is also because of the vast array of parties and party systems that have emerged around the world in recent decades. Making sense of this dynamic and variegated landscape is daunting. And yet, if Schattschneider (2003 [1942]: 1) is right that “modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties,” then better understanding party dynamics should be central to a research agenda concerned with the democratic institutions and representation.

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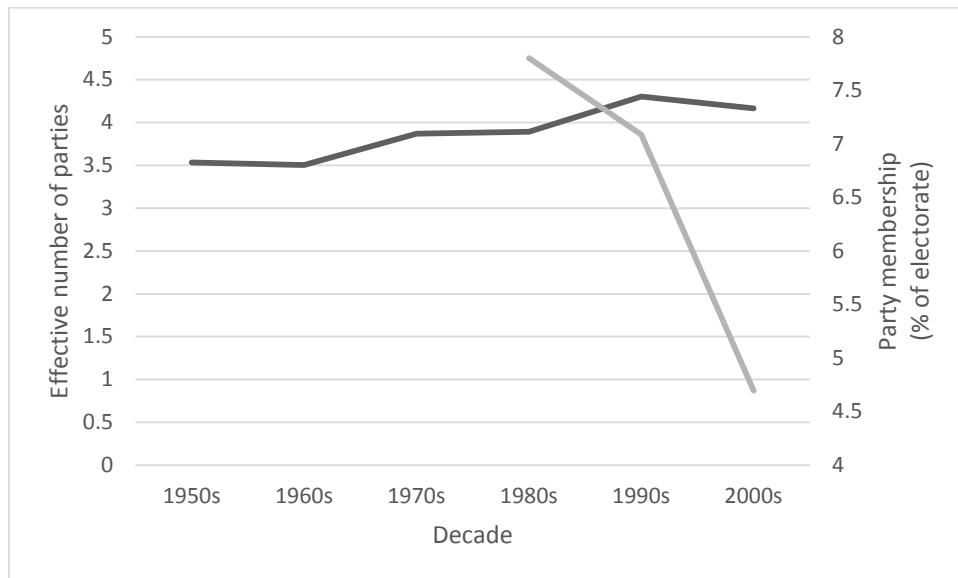
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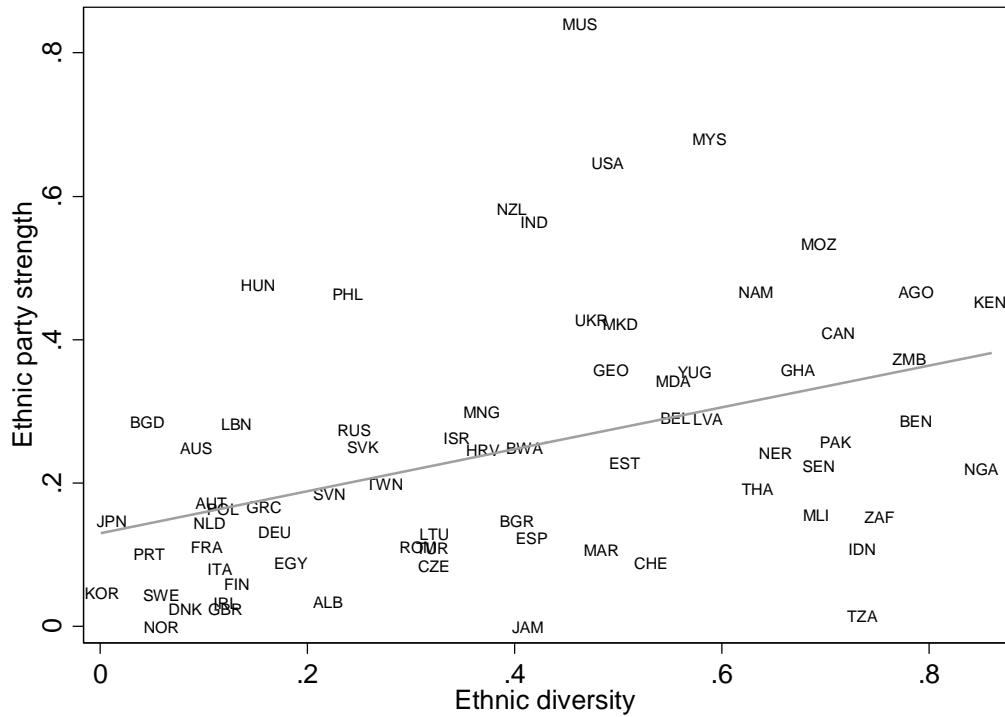
**Figure 1: Electoral fragmentation in advanced democracies, 1950-2010**



*Notes:* Values on the black line represent the average effective number of electoral parties across advanced industrial democracies in each decade. The effective number of electoral parties is calculated using the index developed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979) with the correction for an ‘other’ category (Taagepera 1997). Values on the gray line represent the average across Western European countries of party members as a proportion of the electorate.

*Source:* Bormann and Golder (2013); Van Biezen et al. (2012)

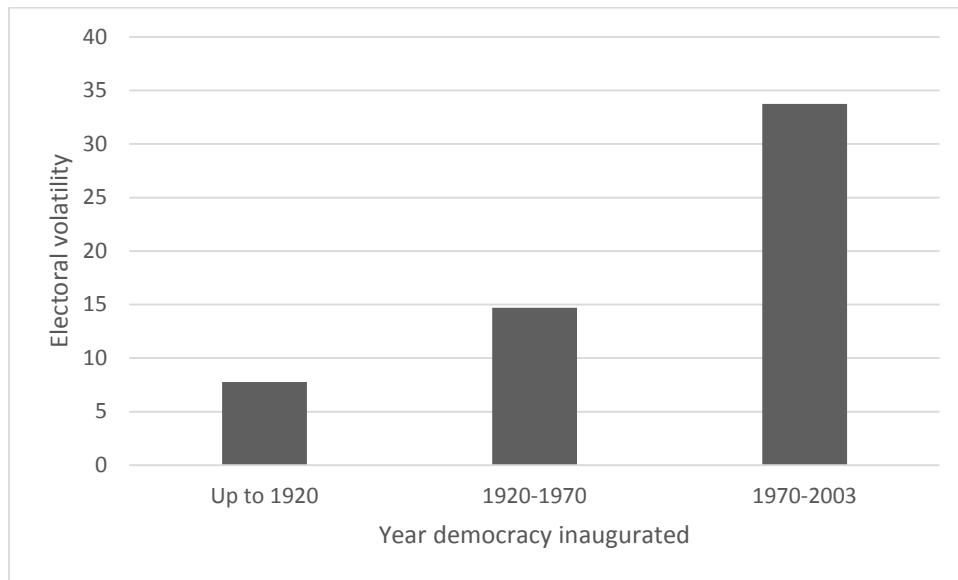
**Figure 2: Ethnic diversity and ethnic party strength**



*Notes:* Ethnic diversity is measured using the index of ethnic fractionalization developed by Alesina et al. (2003). The index uses survey samples to measure the probability that two randomly selected individuals from have the same ethnicity. The strength of ethnic parties in each country is calculated as the weighted average of party scores on a measure of ethnic-based support derived from the Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project. The DALP asked experts in 2008-2009, “Do the following parties have strong linkages to ethnic/linguistic organizations?” Responses to this question are averaged across experts by party. The weighted average across parties in each country uses the party’s average vote share in the two national legislative elections prior to 2009. The gray line represents the best-fit line.

Sources: Alesina et al. (2003); Kitschelt (2013)

**Figure 3: Electoral volatility in old and new democracies**



*Notes:* Values represent the average electoral volatility since the inauguration of democracy (or 1945, for democracies born before 1902) across countries that transitioned to democracy during each time period. Data are for 47 democracies included in the first module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems.

*Source:* Mainwaring and Zoco (2007)